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AUTHOR Tester, Frank James; Kulchyski, Peter
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ABSTRACT

Between 1939 and 1963, the Canadian federal government embarked on a program of relocation and relief in the Eastern Arctic that dramatically altered the lives of Inuit living there. This book begins with an account of the debate over whether Inuit are Indians and, therefore, which branch of government should be responsible for them. It then discusses how the development of the postwar Canadian welfare state coincided with attempts to assimilate Inuit and organize their lives according to Western ideas about the family, work, education, and community. Such policies resulted in many mistakes that led to social disruption, cultural disintegration, and even death among the Inuit. Family relocation and settlement was frequently related to children's attendance in school, and to the "family allowance" system, which based welfare subsidies on the number of children present. A detailed account examines a federal government attempt to deal simultaneously with two concerns--establishing territorial integrity in the Arctic and managing Inuit within Canadian societal norms--by relocating Inuit from the east coast of Hudson Bay to the high Arctic. Subsequent chapters deal with tragic events taking place in the Keewatin region in the late 1950s, including deaths from starvation at Henik and Garry Lakes. The subsequent relocation of the survivors and further attempts to assimilate Inuit into mainstream Canadian society are examined. Throughout the book, the themes of responsibility, relief, and relocation emerge as central concepts in understanding this unique and often troublesome period in Canadian history. Contains over 100 references, an index, maps, and photographs. (TD)